

## **Position Paper submitted by Portugal to the United Nations 1<sup>st</sup> Open-ended Ad Hoc Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics (AHOEEG)**

Portugal aligns itself with the EU and its MS submission for the AHOEEG on Marine Litter and Microplastics and thanks the Secretariat for giving the chance to express our views on such an important issue. A breadth of information, studies and data is already available to start addressing the options mentioned in the report. But more is needed.

Marine litter starts off by being just waste. It's only after entering the marine environment that it becomes 'marine litter'. Marine litter and microplastics are hence the expression of our global lack of capacity to, jointly and efficiently, address the issue of waste and its environmentally sound management, in our economies and societies.

The core issue here is *'how to deal with litter and microplastics, in a holistic and integrated manner, upstream and downstream?* The upstream ill-management of waste will have consequences downstream (marine litter and microplastics in the marine environment). And, the situation downstream has become so environmentally dire that we also need to consider mitigating impacts, given that marine litter and microplastics is already producing a significant harm to biodiversity, the economies of coastal states and to Human health (v.g. plastic poisoning in the food chain).

Also, complex challenges lie ahead: on one hand, we need to leave behind the linear economy model, to transition to a circular economy. On the other, we need to change our lifestyle and production/consumption patterns to a more sustainable approach (encompassing the 3 dimensions of sustainability: social/economical/environmental).

Effective action is therefore required in order to prevent and minimize waste, while also developing sustainable consumption and production patterns, including by adopting the 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle). Similarly, measures such as market-based solutions to reduce waste and its production, as well as the promotion of environmentally-sound waste management, disposal and recycling are also needed, and a lot more has to be done in terms of promoting the production of reusable or recyclable products.

Thus, Portugal is highly concerned with the global problem of marine litter and microplastics, not only because we are a coastal state but also because this is an issue that also concerns our citizens, impacting the economy, food security and population well-being, motivating our society for action, as a whole, and at all levels. The potential for multistakeholder involvement to help solve the problem is why we fully share the view of the UNEA-3 report on advancing platforms to engage with all those who of have an interest in preventing and combating marine litter and microplastics, namely industry, researchers, entrepreneurs and NGO's. We need to work together and share studies, experience and diligent engagement in order to succeed.

We believe action on this issue is crucial and instrumental in order to ensure the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development, particularly target 14.1, as well as to implement the commitments made during the 2017 Ocean Conference to support the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources.

2. It is our understanding that the major constraints and barriers to effectively combatting marine litter and microplastics are:

- The amount of waste generated by economies and the respective discards/discharges (voluntary and involuntary, directly or indirectly) to terrestrial and marine environments;
- The ocean circulation patterns and insufficient knowledge associated to the 5 gyres systems to help predict the local accumulation patterns of floating marine litter;
- Difficulties in removing deep sea marine litter and the lack of cost-effective technologies;
- Fragmentation of both “traditional” and oxo-degradable plastics, and how their degradation processes enhance the problem of microplastics;
- Need to have stronger measures addressing single-use plastics, particularly in terms of efficiency and efficacy of its use by industrial and home consumers;
- Promote country’s self-sufficiency for recycling plastic materials, thus enhancing the economic value associated to their recovery and ensuring that these processes take place under controlled conditions, aiming at a “*clean*” circular economy;
- Difficulties in involving all seafaring communities for the marine litter problem, in particular fishermen and the fishing industry, considering the fact that a huge part of the negative impact of marine pollution is related to lost and discarded fishing gear;
- Difficulties in passing the message to the common civil society (citizens in general), in a way that causes changing in careless behaviors;
- The lack of implementation, at local, regional and global levels, of the existing instruments and conventions;
- The false assumption that plastic waste is garbage (and does not have economic value).

3. Our views on potential national, regional and international response options and associated environmental, social and economic costs:

Coastal states suffer the most from the global problem of marine litter pollution. Due to this frailty, cooperation at international level is needed to help protecting their exposed territories, the coastal populations and their sea-based economies (with a focus on fisheries and tourism), as well as their marine natural resources and biodiversity. On a national level, the main contribution will come from enhanced legislation, with the legal possibility of imposing fines, and monitoring, as well as the enabling environment to achieve Civil Society engagement.

On a regional level, and applying a basin approach, it’s fundamental to have, internally, coordination, efficiency and effectiveness and, externally, cooperation, coherence and

complementarity. Only an active international cooperation will have positive and significant effects in reducing the amount of litter being discharged into the marine environment.

*Who does what? How can we allocate and deploy the adequate means for addressing marine litter in high seas hotspots? How can we survey and monitor the marine litter inputs? How can we apply the polluter pays principle and increase producer responsibility?*

The answers to these and many other questions will imply a national responsibility and an international engagement in cooperation programmes, and active involvement of key stakeholders at international level, both at governmental level and relevant stakeholders from the private sector, academia, NGO's and civil society as a whole. Also, at some point, it will be reasonable to have common and shared means of implementation for combating marine litter.

#### 4. Our views on the feasibility and effectiveness of different response options:

In our view, short-term action should involve the reduction of the high amounts of litter from the marine environment and the gradual decline of anthropogenic discards and discharges of plastic waste and industrial microplastic (both land and sea based). Medium and longer term actions could, in turn, address the issue of eradicating plastics altogether from the marine environment and tackle the issue of plastic poisoning in the food chain.

- As a follow-up to the UNEA-3, and alike other global environmental problems, we believe that only a holistic and integrated global response can be effective in contributing to implement and strengthen global commitments on this issue.
- We support the development of a global and coordinated response with a multilayered governance and holistic approach, linking up (and building on) existing processes, structures and initiatives, out of which we would like to stress the most recent ones carried out during the beginning of 2018 at European level, regarding the issue of plastics, and integrated in the mini package on circular economy. The debate on the most appropriate response to address this issue should take into consideration the work of existing structures and initiatives, as well as the purpose of avoiding duplication of efforts and promoting an effective and efficient system of governance whereby all the different relevant players take action in a coherent and integrated way.
- A structure, under UN framework, mandated with addressing this issue in a permanent and dedicated way would provide a number of benefits that should be highlighted and merit consideration when discussing the way forward at the AHOEEG.

Much like an orchestral symphony - where there are several instruments that need to play together the same music - the results to be obtained need to be far greater than the simple sum of each element. We are not sure we need a new orchestra, but we are convinced that

we need a '*maestro*' and a 'room' for the current one (and, depending on the conclusions of the AHOEEG, perhaps 'new instruments' to complete the piece/composition).

5. We agree with the UNEA-3 report and the necessity to mainstream the issue of environmentally sound waste management and waste prevention into national development strategies. Prioritizing waste management alongside other urgencies such as climate change and poverty reduction is instrumental if we want to have an impact in people's lives and oceans health, especially in developing countries. We need to keep in mind that sustainability includes social and economic dimensions (not just environmental) and we should thus make every effort to mainstream the notion of the economic value of plastic waste (according to the recycling sector, the plastics recycling industry was valued at \$31.5 billion in 2015, and is expected to reach \$56.8 billion in 2025) and the potential for job creation of the recycling sector, and we must explore solutions to build a new model of plastic neutral economies and societies.

The problem of marine litter can only be solved if the civil society, including industry and common citizens are fully involved and engaged since the early stages. Present and future educational and learning programmes have to include matters related with the marine environment. Media and public campaigns for every specific kind of public have to be generalized all over the world.

Without changing our usual behaviors the impact of the measures will be not enough.

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